Parliamentary panel visits Thanjavur Big Temple

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News

Dinamalar and Daily Thanthi reported that members of Parliament's Department-related Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture, led by its chairman Sanjay Kumar Jha, visited the Grand Anicut (Kallanai) and the Thanjavur Big Temple in Thanjavur district on 16 November 2026. The committee viewed the temple's ancient paintings, inscriptions and sculptures; members including Sudha Murty, S. Kalyanasundaram and K.E. Prakash attended, and District Collector R. Revathi received them. That morning the committee had also visited the Sri Ranganathaswamy temple at Srirangam, and it held talks with Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) officials on culture and on air services to Thanjavur. 'Until now we considered only the Taj Mahal a great wonder; the Big Temple, built a thousand years ago, is even grander,' Jha said. He added that the committee would certainly recommend that the temple, already a UNESCO World Heritage Site, be included in a 'wonders of the world' list. Notably, there is no official intergovernmental body or list of 'world wonders'.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Committee	DRSC on Transport, Tourism and Culture (Rajya Sabha)
Chairman	Sanjay Kumar Jha, Rajya Sabha MP
Date	16 November 2026

Point	Details
Sites visited	Thanjavur Big Temple, Grand Anicut (Kallanai)
Built by	Rajaraja Chola I; consecrated c. 1010 CE
Architect	Kunjara Mallan Raja Raja Perunthachan (inscription)
Vimana	About 66 m (216 ft) tall; built of granite
UNESCO	1987 – World Heritage Site; 2004 – extended as 'Great Living Chola Temples'

Background

- UNESCO process – how a site gets listed: a country first places it on its Tentative List; a detailed nomination dossier is then submitted to UNESCO; cultural sites are evaluated by ICOMOS and natural sites by IUCN; and the final decision is taken by the 21-member World Heritage Committee. India's nodal agency for this is the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The Big Temple – 'Rajarajesvaram', built by Rajaraja Chola I (reigned 985–1014 CE) and consecrated around 1010 CE – was inscribed through this process in 1987. No such intergovernmental process exists for 'world wonders'.
- Art and architecture: a peak of Dravidian architecture, the temple's vimana is about 66 m tall and built wholly of granite. It has a large monolithic Nandi, Chola-era murals and sculptures of dance karanas. It became a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987; in 2004 the listing was extended as the 'Great Living Chola Temples' with the Brihadisvara temple at Gangaikondacholapuram and the Airavatesvara temple at Darasuram.
- Polity – parliamentary committees: Department-related Standing Committees (DRSCs) began in 1993; there are now 24 – 16 under the Lok Sabha and 8 under the Rajya Sabha. Each has 31 members (21 Lok Sabha + 10 Rajya Sabha). The Transport, Tourism and Culture committee is serviced by the Rajya Sabha Secretariat; it examines ministries' demands for grants and Bills.
- 'World wonders': the ancient 'Seven Wonders' list comes from Greek writers; only the Great Pyramid of Giza survives. In 2007 the New7Wonders Foundation, a private Swiss body, announced the 'New Seven Wonders' through a public vote, which included the Taj Mahal. This is not intergovernmental recognition; UNESCO did not take part.

Tamil Nadu link: This is entirely a Tamil Nadu story. The Grand Anicut (Kallanai) the committee visited dates to Karikala Chola (believed 2nd century CE). The Airavatesvara temple at Darasuram is also in Thanjavur district; Gangaikondacholapuram is in Ariyalur district. Tamil Nadu celebrates Rajaraja's birth star every year as 'Sadhaya Vizha' in the Tamil month of Aippasi.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

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What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Committee: DRSC on Transport, Tourism and Culture (Rajya Sabha); Chairman: Sanjay Kumar Jha, Rajya Sabha MP; Date: 16 November 2026; Sites visited: Thanjavur Big Temple, Grand Anicut (Kallanai).

What is the background to this news?

UNESCO process – how a site gets listed: a country first places it on its Tentative List; a detailed nomination dossier is then submitted to UNESCO; cultural sites are evaluated by ICOMOS and natural sites by IUCN; and the final decision is taken by the 21-member World Heritage Committee.

Practice questions (with answers)

1. The Department-related Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture is serviced by which House's secretariat?

A) Lok Sabha

B) Rajya Sabha

C) Both Houses by rotation

D) Ministry of Culture

Answer: B – Explanation: Rajya Sabha. Of 24 DRSCs, 8 are under the Rajya Sabha and 16 under the Lok Sabha; each has 31 members (21 + 10).

2. Which Chola king built the Airavatesvara temple at Darasuram in Thanjavur district?

A) Rajaraja I

B) Rajendra I

C) Rajaraja II

D) Kulottunga I

Answer: C – Explanation: Rajaraja II (12th century); the temple was added in 2004 to UNESCO's 'Great Living Chola Temples'. The Thanjavur temple was built by Rajaraja I and the Gangaikondacholapuram temple by Rajendra I.

3. In about which year was the Thanjavur Big Temple, built by Rajaraja Chola I, consecrated?

A) 985 CE

B) 1003 CE

C) 1010 CE

D) 1025 CE

Answer: C – Explanation: About 1010 CE; its millennium was celebrated in 2010. 985 is the year Rajaraja came to the throne.

4. Inscriptions name whom as the chief architect of the Thanjavur Big Temple?

A) Rajendra Chola

B) Karuvur Devar

C) Kunjara Mallan

D) Sekkizhar

Answer: C – Explanation: Kunjara Mallan Raja Raja Perunthachan. Karuvur Devar – Rajaraja's guru; Sekkizhar – author of the Periya Puranam.

5. Which body announced the 2007 'New Seven Wonders of the World', which include the Taj Mahal, through a public vote?

A) UNESCO

B) New7Wonders Foundation

C) ICOMOS

D) World Monuments Fund

Answer: B – Explanation: New7Wonders – a private Swiss body; not an official intergovernmental list. UNESCO listed the Big Temple as a heritage site in 1987.

Sources: Dinamalar (16 Nov 2026); Daily Thanthi (17 Nov 2026); DT Next (16 Nov 2026) – dtnext.in/news/tamilnadu/steps-to-be-initiated-to-enlist-big-temple-on-world-wonders-list-panel; Deccan Chronicle (17 Nov 2026 – members, Srirangam, ASI talks); PIB (Rajya Sabha Secretariat, March 2026); UNESCO World Heritage Centre – whc.unesco.org/en/list/250 (Great Living Chola Temples; UNESCO's 2007 statement on New7Wonders). © Shanmugam IAS Academy.